

THE

HISTORIAN

OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

MAY 2006

MAY HAPPENINGS

The May meeting of the Hancock County Historical Society will be held on Thursday, May 18, 2006, at twelve noon. The speaker for this month's meeting is Ms Annie Schroder from the New Orleans Museum of Art. Please call for reservations as the seating is limited. (467-4090)

The Board has planned a second work day for the yard. The last one was a huge success and our yard looks so much better. Now we need to give it some finishing touches. If you can help on Thursday May 25, at nine o'clock please let us know.

The Board is also in need of some one to volunteer to be in charge of the luncheon preparation each month or to just assist. Please call if you are interested.

NEW MEMBERS

Charlie & Terri Webb
Sarah Jane Pieper
Dusty & Mimi Rhodes
Charlie M. Boh
Duffy A. Hoffman
Virgil Nelson
Dr. Mary H. Ellis
Linda C. Heil



The Mystery Quilt

Katrina Treasure

By Dale St. Amant

During the clean up after Katrina people salvaged items from their own homes in the debris. Teapots, silverware, broken pieces of furniture, picture frames were carried by the surge of water willy-nilly from the homes of others.

A few weeks ago a California reporter came into the Historical Society bringing with him

a box containing a quilt. He had enticed it from Joan Coleman and thought the HCHS might be able to solve the mystery of the quilt's owner.

According to Joan, a family from New Orleans who had a summer home in Waveland between Vacation Lane and Waveland Avenue found the quilt while they were cleaning their lot. After being carefully washed and cleaned, the red and yellow quilt revealed a name

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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Editor - Dale St. Amant

Published monthly by the

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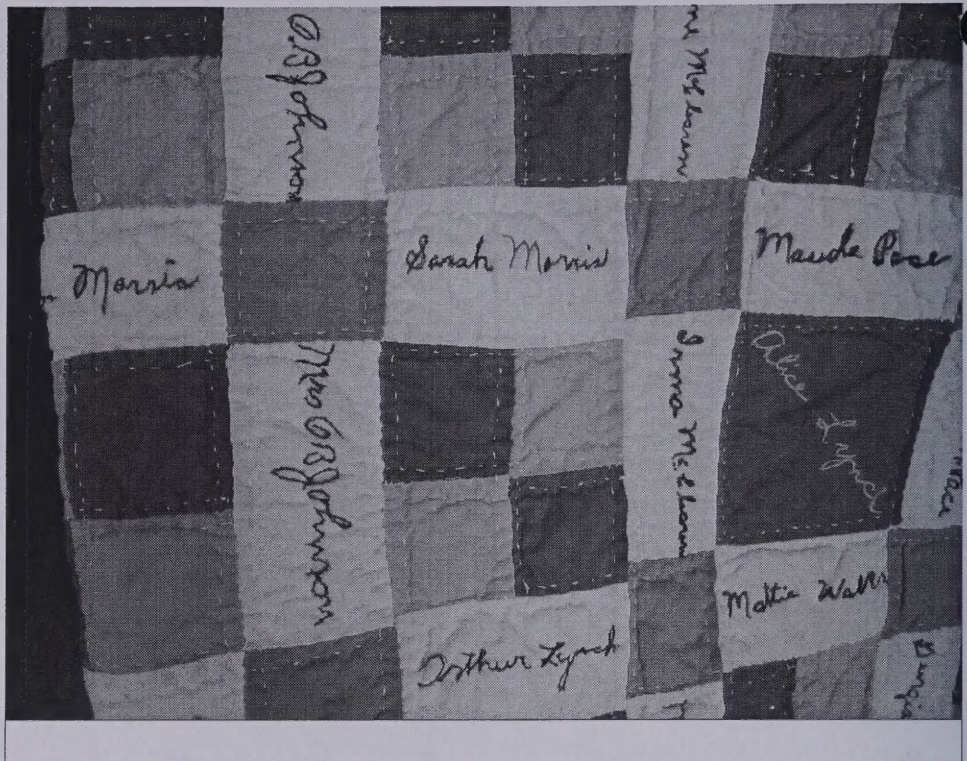
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"TO PRESERVE THE GENERAL AND ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF HANCOCK COUNTY AND TO PRESERVE THE KATE LOBRANO HOUSE AND COLLECTIONS THEREIN; TO RESEARCH AND INTERPRET LIFE IN HANCOCK COUNTY; AND TO ENCOURAGE AN APPRECIATION OF AND INTEREST IN HISTORICAL PRESERVATION."



Joan says she was in line at school picking up her child when a lady came up to her and asked if she happened to know any of the names on the quilt. Joan didn't, but said she would take it and display it at the Waveland Market on Saturday mornings. Possibly someone would see it there and recognize some of the names. So far no luck.

If this quilt looks familiar to you, please call us at the Historical Society, 228- 467-4090 or Joan Coleman at 228-363-1759.

Some of the names found on the quilt are as follows; Martha Bruce, Carolyn Bruce, Ruth Greer, Minnie Qualls, James Sharp. Anna Horn, Sarah Morris, Clara Brown, Marie Roden, E.D. Thompson, Arthur Lynch, Maude Pose, Coy Lancaster Jr., Daisy McClearence.

**Cadet La Fontaine**

By Russell Guerin (based in part on a personal interview with Bert Nicaise)

Penicaut: "After three days we left that place (Bay of St. Louis) and three leagues away we found a creek up which the tide ascends. The savages who were guiding us led us to believe that this creek went into a big lake; but, as we were not sure of their words, we make signs to them that we wanted to go on."

Thus Andre Penicaut, an expert ship builder who traveled with Iberville, described Bayou Caddy in 1699. His text goes on to confirm the location, ... later he tells of what we now call Heron Bay. It was to be many years later, in the early part of the nineteenth

century, that this little – but important – bayou was explored and settled by someone other than a full-blooded Indian, this time in the person of Jean Cadet LaFontaine.

Now, another century and a half later, we can record more information about this settler through the research done by his great, great, granddaughter, one of our own society members. She is “Bert” Ladner Nicaise, an accomplished genealogist.

Her ancestry is indeed rich in the names of many of those who came early on to what would eventually become Mississippi. They include such illustrious names as Simon Favre and Christian L’Adnier. The Nicaise family itself is one of the earliest in the Bay St. Louis area, having acquired their land from the Sauciers, recorded as the earliest residents of what is now Bay St. Louis. Madame Charlot, according to Bert’s research, was the mother-in-law of Cadet Lafontaine and left to him and his wife Celeste a large section of the downtown area. Madame Charlot’s land grant dates from 1781.

So who was the man who went up this bayou to settle as a pioneer, the waterway becoming known by a corruption of his name as Bayou Caddy? Jean, whose father was Jean Pierre Lafontaine, was named Jean “Cadet” LaFontaine, which translates as the “youngest son.” He was born in New Orleans on April 5, 1795.

His ancestors have been traced to his great grandparents, Jean Frederique dit LaFontaine and Marie Isabelled La Vallee, natives of France; Jean Frederique had sailed from his homeland on the ship *Phillippe*, out of La Ro-

chelle. (This was the same seaport that was the birthplace of the historian Penicaut, quoted above.) They were married in New Orleans in 1728, only ten years after the founding of the city by Bienville.

Exactly when Cadet first sailed his schooner up Bayou Caddy cannot be known, but it is recorded that he was given land as payment for his service in the War of 1812, possibly at New Orleans. This is referred to in our county deed books as “Military Bounty Land Act of 28 September 1850.” Undoubtedly, he had settled up the bayou long before the grant.

Bert states that Cadet was part Choctaw and his wife Celeste was Indian, presumably Choctaw. They married in 1821. Quoting Bert, they “raised eight children, three girls and five boys. They all lived in this same area except the youngest son. He lived in Dillville, now called Bayou Lacroix. They all had large families.”

Many of their descendants still live in the area, and many of those who have passed on are buried in the Bayou Caddy Cemetery. It is a quaint, well manicured cemetery, not far from the site of Cadet’s home, now demolished. Bert’s grandmother’s home still stands, however; originally a log cabin, it is now covered with siding and not recognizable as such. Just outside the cemetery grounds, it is believed to be the oldest house in the area. (Katrina damaged the house and the family is not sure they will rebuild.)

The cemetery is the result of a gift of 4.3 acres by Celeste after Cadet’s death. His tomb is prominently marked, showing the

commemoration of his service in the War of 1812. He died in 1852.

Their son donated an acre of land on which the picturesque little white church was built. It is known as “St. Ann’s Mission” and still stands on Lower Bay Road, very near the cemetery and other land still owned by descendants, ten acres being in Bert’s name. (Katrina washed the little church across Lower Bay road but it is still standing.)

There is so much information in Bert’s records that it would take a book to do justice to it. For now, some of the history of Cadet LaFontaine and other relatives will be added to the society’s files. This writer sincerely appreciates Bert’s efforts, and he is confident that her efforts will be helpful to others interested in recording the history of our area.

1969

5,500 Acres In Hancock County Diamondhead Properties, Inc. to build \$100 Million Complex

Dale St. Amant

“Plans for the largest residential/resort type recreational community in the southern part of the United States, to be located on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, were unveiled last Thursday at a press conference attended by Lt. Governor, Charles L. Sullivan, members of the Governor’s Emergency Council and other state and city officials from Mississippi and the Gulf Coast.

William H. Maurer, Presi-

dent, Diamondhead Properties, Inc., presented detailed information on the project, including architectural renderings of various facilities, which will be a part of the development.

Lt. Governor Sullivan commended the principals of "Diamondhead" for their "faith and confidence" and hailed the project as one of greatest importance to the rebuilding of a newer and greater Gulf Coast.

The project has been named "DIAMONDHEAD" because it is situated on the highest ground in the Mississippi Gulf Coast area, with elevations ranging up to 105 feet. The development will incorporate much of the Hawaiian style in architecture and landscaping reminiscent of its Pacific Island namesake.

It is located in the Bay St. Louis area, with 11 miles of shoreline, 2 miles on the Bay of St. Louis and 9 miles on the Jordan River and Bayou. The property has 7 miles of frontage on the new Interstate 10 Highway, with an interchange located in the center of the project.

An area of some 5,500 acres will be developed. According to Maurer, Phase 1 of the project, planned to start immediately, will include the construction of ten model homes to be available to the public at builders' cost. Also planned for the initial phase will be the clubhouse, an airport, central marina, riding stables, driving range, 18 holes of a 36-hole golf course, a condominium apartment complex, security guard entrance, a sales pavilion, and an administration building.

Initial parcel of lots, approximately 1000, will be available for public sale by June 1970. Initial capital investment involved is in excess of five million dollars.

The clubhouse complex will incorporate swimming pools, sauna baths, therapeutic pools, tennis courts, golf shop, dining room, coffee shop, lounge, game rooms, and specialty shops. Upon completion, this facility's cost is estimated to be in excess of a million dollars.

The master development plan provides for a commercial shopping center, schools and churches. When Diamondhead is completed in its entirety, it will represent a total investment in excess of \$1000,000,000.

Tourists and residents who travel along the Mississippi Gulf Coast usually look out over the back bay as they cross the bridge at Bay St. Louis. They are attracted by the tree-lined beach and a cream-colored structure that faces the Bay and the Bay St. Louis bridge. To the left of this monastery (today it is Dupont), there are approximately 6,000 acres of beautiful wooded and rolling land, containing an abundance of 100-year old oak and pine trees. This area is on the highest ground in the Mississippi Gulf coast with elevations ranging up to 105 feet.

There is where Diamondhead Properties, Inc. will develop a most unusual residential/resort type project, envisioned to become the largest ever undertaken in the southern part of the United States.

To many old settlers of the gulf Coast, this area is known as the Gex property, steeped in history and tradition. The Gex family moved from New Orleans to Hancock County in 1889.

A WHITE EGRET IN THE SHALLOWS: A Book About The Way We Were

By Paul Estronza La Violette

Things are changing. This is the fourth book I've written about the life my wife Stella and I have led living in a small Mississippi town on the Gulf of Mexico. We've done this in the pleasant company of local friends, a series of large dogs, a black cat, and all the wonders that come with living in a beach house in a southern coastal town.

(Preface to A White Egret in the Shallows)

These words open my new book, *A White Egret in the Shallows*. They were written while Stella and I were up on her farm in Pennsylvania, with late December snow covering the long steep driveway, and temperatures in the teens and the wind whistling around the old farmhouse.

However, my original preface did not contain that first sentence. On that Sunday in August when Stella and I had packed Holly, our black Tomcat, my old laptop, and clothes for three days in the car and fled the coming storm, the finished book was in the laptop. Months later as I sat by the wintry farmhouse window and reread the finished text, I realized a revision was needed.

I realized that what I had written was unique, that the book described a golden era, wondrous

time, a style of life that with Katrina, was gone forever. I began to slightly alter the essence of the book and found that when I was through; I had made a book about Katrina. Not in the sense of graphic descriptions of the brutal debris and confused, almost criminal mismanagement, but of what Katrina took away from us.

I left the stories much as they were, leaving them to reveal the wonderfully rich ambiance of coastal living. I did, however, re-orient them slightly to show the slow social changes (condominiums, casinos, shrimp-ing decline, etc) that had take place on the coast prior to the storm and finally in the last two chapters, the stark emotional damage of the storm's aftermath.

It is a book to be enjoyed, but to remember as you turn the pages that what you are reading is not about now but about the way things were.

THE END OF A TIME

(edited excerpt by Dale St. Amant)

Stella had left her key ring on the table where I was working.

She's outside hanging clothes on a makeshift clothesline: I was making notes on the chores I had to do for the day. It was a long list.

I had to call and get an Internet service connected to the old farmhouse so I could address e-mail with my laptop. Find out where I could buy another cell phone for Stella to replace the one we had left at the house, cancel our old phone service, see about cable service for the borrowed TV.

The list was too long. I picked up Stella's keys. Any di-

vergence would be welcome.

Unlike my own keys, which are on two separate rings, truck keys on one, car keys on another, Stella's keys are all on one ring. In total, they make quite a handful, a bulge in her purse that I kid her about. She lost her keys once...

But today, as I looked at the keys on the ring she had left on the table, I realized that if she lost them now, the expense would be small.

I began pulling off keys from her ring that were no longer useable.

The first to be removed was my truck key and its remote opener. There was no longer a white Ford Ranger for me to drive around. The Ranger had been a wonderfully pleasant truck that I enjoyed driving. ...

It was no longer invisible; it was gone.

The next key on Stella's ring was the post office box key.

... I usually drive once a day to Coleman Avenue and collect my mail from the Waveland post office.

I suppose it's possible that the small building may be still standing. I doubt it. The building stood at a comparatively low elevation and, despite being brick, has probably been washed away by the 35-foot storm surge of Katrina that all of Waveland and Bay St. Louis had experienced.

In any case, it would be awhile before the post office would be operating again. I took the key off and put it aside, sort of something that will come back in use in the indistinct future. ... I

looked at the few keys remaining

on Stella's ring. The last key that I was looking at would be the hardest to remove. It was our house key.

Stella and I had lived in that house for thirty years. We had designed and built much of its sprawling redwood structure ourselves. Each year we had expanded it with the help of a close friend. Working in the heat, arguing about what we were doing, modifying, extending the structure until the end, it fitted Stella and me like a glove,

In the last week, before the storm) I had been working aboard a 36' trawler owned by Ned, a friend who lived in Pass Christian. He, I, and three other close friends had spent the week sailing the western end of the Mississippi Sound, mapping the debris field of an 1812 naval battle. ... "Katrina's coming right at us. It's up to a category three and will be here late Sunday, early Monday."

We quickly broke off mapping and headed the trawler back to Bay St. Louis..., we all went to my house where Stella was waiting with a farewell supper.

It was a glorious, wonderful evening that fitted well the ambience of the old house. We sat in the dining room, told stories, laughed, spoke about next year until late in the evening, then broke up and said our goodbyes.

Stella and I spent Saturday cleaning up, lowering storm shutters and clearing things about the grounds. It was work, but it was a drill we were used to doing. The coming hurricane, while promising to be bad, didn't worry us overly much.

That night, Stella and I went to bed tired, debating wearily whether in the morning we should stay in the house or leave and seek shelter. ... We went to sleep.

The next morning, I got up at 6:30 and turned on the cable TV weather station. Katrina was now a category 4 and would increase to be a category 5 by noon. ... I woke Stella and told her we had just a few hours to leave before the roads became clogged with evacuees. We gathered our important papers together, downloading the two computers to a laptop, packed a few clothes, put Holly in his carrier and, driving Stella's car, left by 10:30.

My white truck stayed in the garage. Maybe...

Monday, we sat in a hotel room in Tallahassee, Florida and watched the radar show the storm's eye make the hurricane's third landfall, this time directly on the Mississippi coast.... That night, we slept knowing that the chances of

our escaping a personal tragedy were very small.

Aerial pictures over the next few days showed that the tragedy was much more than personal. They indicated that the Mississippi towns, especially Waveland, Bay St. Louis, and Pass Christian, had been washed over by a storm surge 35 to 40 feet high that had gone a mile inland. Nothing was left.

Not only was our home gone, but our town was gone as well.

We are in Pennsylvania now, staying at an old farmhouse, sleeping in the same room where Stella had been born many years ago.

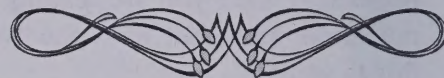
There have been significant changes in the last two years, changes that threatened the physical and social fabric of the two towns Waveland and the Bay. Katrina's drastic changes overshadow all of these earlier changes.

Things will continue to evolve. I believe much of the won-

derful easy ways of a small southern coastal town that have so carefully tried to document in my writings are gone. ...

So, as to the keys, it hurt, but I began removing the house key from the key chain.

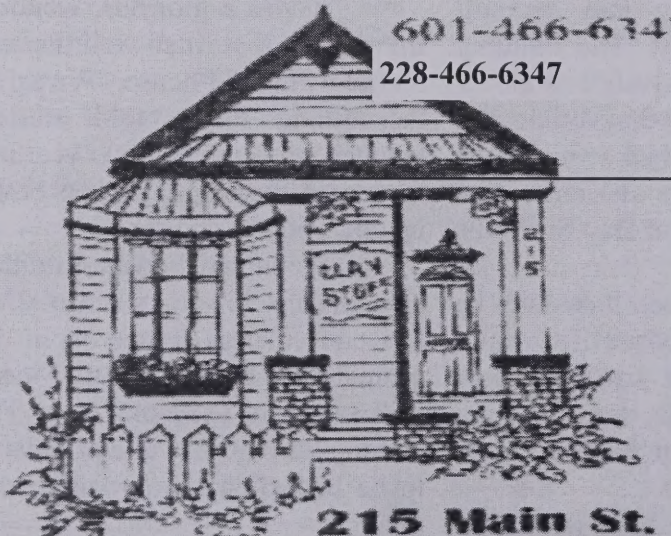
Paul and Stella will be back. How do I know? Because in one of his stories he says: "I hate the cold; I hate the snow; I hate the isolating prison the cold makes of the old farmhouse when the falling snow is heavy and the driveway ices and the winds batter on the walls. I hate the day after day gray sky and the desolate landscape with its barren trees and frozen hard ground." Besides, can Stella catch her own flounder to stuff in Pennsylvania?



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A White Egret in the Shallows

*A book about the way we
were*



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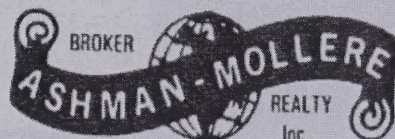


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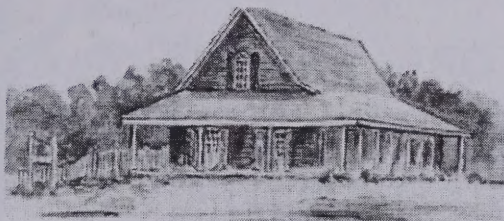
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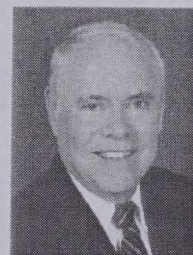
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